

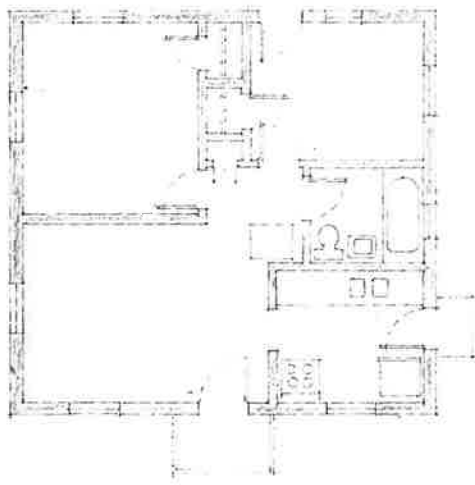


# Morningside Square: "Logan's Levittown"

By Dan Christensen

To a house hunter in the 1990s, it may look like a cheap rent district. To a paperboy in the 1960s, it looked like Dennis the Menace's neighborhood. To a young veteran in the 1940s, it looked like a place to begin again and to raise a family. However ordinary Logan's Morningside Square seems to some observers, it belongs to a significant chapter in American history: the period when the political and industrial machines of war refocused their forces toward long-postponed domestic concerns, when the planners, developers, bankers, and craftsmen cooperated to build the architecture of recovery.

Lack of home building during the Great Depression and World War II left 3.5 million Americans scrambling for a place to live and raise a family. Federal programs put FHA and VA mortgages at the disposal of these potential buyers and astute developers built new homes on available land as fast as they could. Thus the modern suburb was born. Definitive of this phenomenon was Levittown on Long Island, New York, still considered the largest ever single-builder housing project. Abraham, William, and Alfred Levitt assembled an entire community of more than 17,000 homes as well as village greens, shopping centers, playgrounds, swimming pools, bowling alleys, a town hall, and land for schools and churches.



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*This floor plan of a home in Morningside Square illustrates the small size of the houses in the division. It is also remarkably similar to the floor plan of the Levittown houses on Long Island. Courtesy of Dan Christensen.*

## Housing Scarcity

In 1946, Clair Lundberg and his new wife moved into a two-room apartment in his uncle's home in Logan. They had found no other available housing. The shortage of housing in Logan at the end of World War II was generated largely by the return of local people who had been serving in the military, the arrival of students from out-of-town (many of whom were also veterans), and the hiring of professors and staff at Utah State Agricultural College, now Utah State University, to accommodate the influx in enrollment.

Classifieds in Logan's Herald Journal evidence housing needs in "Wanted to Rent" and "Wanted to Buy" ads. A September 5, 1947 front-page story describes a program to persuade Logan residents to "adopt an Aggie" and speaks encouragingly of "progress made to get the FHFA to complete a big 308 apartment project east of the campus."

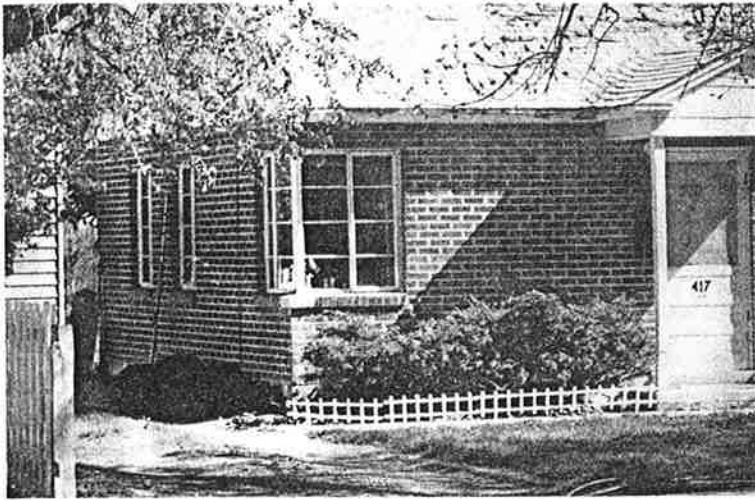
The project the article refers to was a row of defense-housing-style prefabricated units considered to be a temporary solution for accommodating the new breed called "married students"—married men couldn't afford to go to college before the GI Bill.



Single women could vie for a berth in the Agricultural College's only dormitory, Lund Hall. The rest of the students lived in town or in fraternity and sorority houses. Dormitories for men and additional ones for women were constructed in the late 1950s, but even in 1961, when Karen Christensen Luthy shared an overcrowded apartment at Merrill Hall, the University asked her parents to board students in their Logan home in exchange for Karen's coveted spot on campus.

#### Logan Improvement Company, Inc.

Aware of their town's housing needs in the mid-1940s, Logan businessmen joined forces to develop a commercial housing project. On December 5, 1946, a plat of Morningside Square was filed by the Logan Improvement Company. Signing as president was W.W. "Chub" Lundberg and, as secretary, Russell S. Hanson. Also signing were Curtis L. Miner, mayor, Geo. B. Bowen and Glenn G. Nielsen, commissioners, and Ray C. Hugie, city engineer. The identified plat began at Tenth North—extending 600 feet north—and Fourth East—extending 500 feet east. Sixty building lots and two new 50-foot-wide streets, Bonneville Avenue and Crescent Drive, were platted. Standard building lots were 50 feet wide by 104 feet deep. Corner lots were 62.5 feet wide by 85 feet deep. A recreation area approximately 168 feet by 155 feet was platted in the back corner of the project.



*One facade scheme of Morningside Square homes features the corner casement windows popularized by Frank Lloyd Wright. Photo courtesy of Dan Christensen.*

Forty-five houses, almost square and identical in appearance, were placed in rows in the subdivision. Each house was twenty-five feet wide with a centered, projecting porch six feet wide. Facades came in two schemes, varying only in placement of windows: one featured windows centered in the walls of the interior rooms and one

featured corner casement windows a la Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater home. Exterior brick alternated in color between red and yellow. Curbs, gutters, and sidewalks were constructed and elm trees planted along the street. Two willow trees were planted in each back yard. Although space was available for parking by the side of the houses, carports were not included and driveways were not paved.

While Morningside Square homes were similar to Levitt homes in their relative uniformity and small size, they were not constructed with the same high-quality materials used in Levittowns. Vera Anderson Christensen, whose husband, Guy Christensen, worked on the project as a carpenter, remembers her husband remarking on the cheapness of construction. A current owner, Doris Mayne, describes the ease with which she and a friend demolished the cinder block wall between living room and bedroom "except for the concrete piece above the bedroom door. That was solid."

The houses had no basements or crawl spaces; they were built over slabs on grade as were Levitt houses. Unlike Levitt radiant heating, each Morningside Square home was heated by a small oil furnace centrally located in the hall. Water supply pipes were run through the attic causing freezing problems in winter. Water heaters were also placed in the attic. Floors were finished in asphalt tile and counters with linoleum.

Roofs were gabled, but not high enough to expand living space into the attic as were the Levittown roofs. Gable ends were filled in with shake siding. Roofing material was asphalt shingles.

Space for a washer and dryer was not provided. A long wire clothesline was placed in each backyard, however, and many early owners added back porches to accommodate a washer. Doris Mayne recalls a neighbor who did her laundry in a washer pulled up to the side door where water could be carried from the kitchen sink.

But who could complain at the price? Project president Chub Lundberg explains, "We put them in a home for \$29.95 a month. And gave them an electric stove and refrigerator."



*The tree-lined streets and the congruity of the houses in Morningside Square contribute to the nostalgic quality of the neighborhood. Photo courtesy of Dan Christensen.*

### Community Property

According to the original agreement, lot 50 was to be shared by the residents as a "recreation area." Young children have enjoyed the park as a playground while their parents and neighbors struggled with regular maintenance. The park often looked more like a vacant lot than a common green. Neighborhood picnics were held with the purpose of discussing what to do with their shared problem. Attempted solutions included sharing the work among residents—taking turns with watering and mowing—or paying a small amount for maintenance to the woman whose lot bordered the park. In recent years, Logan City has taken responsibility for the park and consistently keeps it trimmed and green.

### Finding A Home

Residency patterns in Morningside Square have been much like those in an apartment complex. However, despite frequency of turnover, there has been relatively little vacancy. Doris Mayne knows from her neighbors that "people would rather rent a small house than an apartment."

Doris Mayne bought her house for \$6,000 and, at one time, could have sold it for as much as \$45,000. She remarks about her house, "It's the best investment I ever made," and feels "it has served its purpose." Linda Loosle, although she finds her quarters "cramped," enjoys the location and the neighborhood children. Both of these residents have found home at Morningside Square.

When one enters the tree-lined streets, there is a sense of being in simpler times with smaller troubles. Congruity of form and smallness of scale contribute to an easy-to-comprehend quality, like a storybook or movie set. Images of morning papers, barking dogs, and children on their way to school are directly linked to this engaging neighborhood.

The developers achieved the post-war American dream in miniature; they planned and constructed a community. Gloria Hanson Wright, daughter of project secretary Russell Hanson, remembers how their family after-dinner car rides always included a drive through Morningside Square. "Daddy was so proud of that place," she explains. Project president Chub Lundberg expresses similar satisfaction: "I helped the kids a lot."

(For a recent summary of the history of Levittown, see Alexander O. Boulton, "The Buy of the Century," *American Heritage*, July/August 1993, pp. 62-69.)—D.C.



# Heritage

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## Brigham Young Academy: Politics, Law and Moral Obligations



*The beautiful Education Building, like all the buildings of the historic Brigham Young Academy, is in danger of being demolished.*

In the last issue of *Heritage*, the Brigham Young Academy (BYA) controversy was headed for Federal Court with the Utah Heritage Foundation asking for an injunction to prohibit Provo City from demolishing this historic complex of buildings. On September 8, Judge J. Thomas Greene of the U.S. District Court held that the UHF's request for a stay on demolition should be granted while Provo City and the UHF pursued the correct "due process" procedures on the municipal and state levels. The question being forwarded by Provo City as to whether the historic preservation easement held by the UHF on BYA was valid was not to be answered at this time, though Judge Greene said that for the moment the Court would consider the historic preservation easement valid until other issues surrounding the case are resolved.

This decision left Provo City with the responsibility of following its own municipal procedures on the demolition of buildings, and of allowing the

UHF to be part of the process, including any appeals necessary on the local and state levels. In mid-September, Charles Hugo, the chief building inspector for Provo City, notified Provo City in a letter to the Mayor that BYA was to be considered a "dangerous building." As such, the buildings must either be demolished or have the necessary action taken to correct the violations cited in the letter. After receiving a copy of the letter, the UHF asked Mr. Hugo to grant the Foundation a building permit to properly secure the BYA buildings from unwanted entry. By securing the buildings, the UHF could correct the violations cited by the building inspector and BYA would be protected from the threat of demolition. Mr. Hugo's reply was that the UHF could not have a building permit at this time and must instead go through the appeals process. The UHF filed an appeal with Mr. Hugo and is currently waiting to be notified of the date on which the Provo City Appeals Board will meet to hear this case.

At the same time that it pursued negotiations with Provo City, the UHF also searched for and found a developer interested in restoring BYA. Dr. William Fred Lucas of Austin, Texas has approached both the UHF and Provo City with an offer to purchase the buildings, conduct a six month feasibility study, and use this time to secure his project funding. Provo City already has a developer, Georgetown Development Inc. of Provo, who has gained an option on the BYA property. This agreement stipulates that Provo City deliver to Georgetown Development Inc. vacant land, i.e. property without

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Utah Heritage Foundation, formed in 1966, is a statewide, private non-profit organization. The Foundation, with the intent to give direction and enrichment to our communities, offers opportunities for persons and groups to pool human resources in a partnership for the preservation of Utah's architectural and cultural heritage.